CREATIVE REVELATION

J. G. SIMPSON, D.D.

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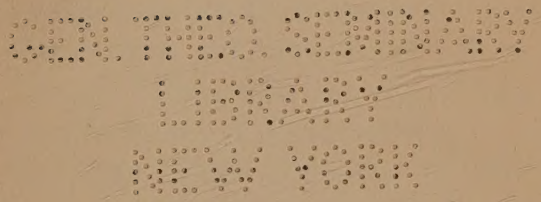
FOUR LECTURES ON THE MIRACULOUS CHRIST

BY

J. G. SIMPSON, D.D.

Canon and Precentor of S. Paul's



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Preface

These lectures were given to the S. Paul's Lecture Society, in the Crypt of the Cathedral, on the Friday evenings of November, 1911. Those who heard them will miss much of the extemporaneous explanation with which they were interspersed. On the other hand, there are many amplifications in the lectures as now printed, while colloquialisms and other roughnesses have been removed. But the general form and directness of address are retained. The proofs have been kindly read by Mr. Brook, of Merton College, and the three notes, together with other modifications, are the result of his suggestive criticisms. I need not add that responsibility for the theories advanced and opinions expressed is entirely my own.

J. G. S.

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Creative Revelation

I

Miracle and Fact

The problem of miracles is perennial. It arises out of the natural indolence of the human mind, which is no less averse from adventure than the physical frame. We live upon the resources that are easily available until the pressure of unsatisfied need drives us into the fields. Till it fails us we are content with the obvious ; we are most of us babies who dislike to be weaned.

But the conditions of human life never grow easier. The motto of the little royal burgh in Scotland, which for many years was my home, is *Contra Nando Incrementum.* "You cannot hope for increase," is its meaning, "except by swimming against the

stream." To those who dwell on the banks of our Scottish rivers, and contemplate the habits of the tribes that move in their waters, the truth of the legend is apparent. And in human affairs none have applied the analogy more forcibly than they. The merchant venturer is the symbol of that commerce by which life is advanced. And religion is no exception to the common rule. It is hard, not easy, to be a Christian. What to the man of little faith looks like a struggle for a bare foothold is the condition of a securer lodgement. It is quite impossible, either for the individual or the community, to settle, once for all, every difficulty that faith presents. Religion would not be a living force if, like Alexander, it ever reached a stage when it had no more worlds to conquer. The new facts which are to reinterpret its message must, in the first instance, be the obstacles that obstruct its progress. That is what CHRIST really meant by the question, "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" Right up to the end of the age there will always be new difficulties to surmount, new and formidable oppositions through which

the Church must plough its way to new triumphs.

It was on the eve of one of the most wonderful revivals of religion that Butler wrote his classic sentences concerning the decay of belief:

"It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all people of discernment, and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world."

The doubts and difficulties of to-day are in form very different from those which issued in this cynical indifference of society to the claims of religion. They are more subtle, more complex, more penetrating, as is natural in an age of higher development and more intricate thought. But all this is a matter of proportion. The task now presented to Christians is relatively not a whit

more stupendous than that which confronted the religious thinkers of the eighteenth century. The omens of coming victories and fresh expansions are not a whit less significant. Personality is asserting itself afresh as a dominant factor in thought, and with it fresh avenues are being opened for the appeal of the Christian Gospel. I feel no temptation to be apologetic for my Christian faith, or to jettison any fragment of the historic Creed. I believe that CHRIST is coming to His own, as He has never done, in the whole history of the Church. When I read a book like Dr. Mott's *Decisive Hour of Christian Missions*, with its immense conviction that the presentation of GOD to man and of man to GOD in JESUS CHRIST is what all nations want to-day, my whole soul glows with a glad, if chastened, confidence that the old Gospel of GOD incarnate, crucified, and risen is the secret, the mystery, the revelation of the ages.

Willingness to think out afresh the central problems of faith in the light of modern knowledge is not the least incompatible with a full assurance of the message which we

have to deliver. On the contrary, the patience which avoids panic, the tolerance which shrinks from condemning inadequate statements of the truth as it is in JESUS, are the measure of the full confidence of our trust. There is only one sort of antagonism to CHRIST, which His disciples are entitled to meet with passionate resentment, and that is moral repudiation of His claim. It is only those who are morally opposed to Him that are in danger of blaspheming against the HOLY SPIRIT. But it is not fundamentally disloyal if men, sincerely anxious to be true to all that is essentially Christian, and strenuously endeavouring to reinterpret religion, to relate it to a wider world of thought and experience, from time to time advance theories which it is difficult to square with the plain man's acceptation of the Creed. We must remember that it is only because we are unfamiliar with the literature of past ages that we imagine all writers, who have escaped the brand of heresy, to have rigidly refrained from speculations not unimpeachably orthodox. Many, who have earned the title of saint, have committed themselves to statements that cannot properly

be reconciled with historical Christianity. It is only by the construction of imperfect explanations that in a constantly-developing world the faith of JESUS advances to fuller intellectual expression. Even the heretics themselves have contributed to this result; and we may be permitted to speculate whether, if past ages had been less clumsy in their habits of thought, not a few of those who have been justly called heretics might never have been driven into a position of definite opposition to the main stream of Christian teaching.

The same difficulties of readjustment appear in every age in relation to the peculiar problems of the time. If Christianity is to advance to a fuller realization of itself and to come out in the twentieth, as in the second, century on the top of contemporary thought, we are bound to think through our religion in relation to the problems which contemporary thought creates. There is no alternative except that confession of intellectual failure, the refusal to think. If we bann the expression of every opinion, which wears the appearance of inadequacy, we shall but renounce

the very method by which truth has invariably established itself. If a man bluntly declares that he does not believe that on the third day JESUS rose again, he has only himself to thank if he is as bluntly told that he is a heretic. If, on the other hand, without denying what he finds it difficult to affirm, he maintains that his own faith in the risen CHRIST does not rest upon the Empty Tomb, the situation is entirely different. My own conviction may be, as indeed it is, that the connection between the two things is a necessary one, and that in the Creed of the Church, as distinguished from the faith of the particular individual, no such separation will ultimately be found to be possible. But inadequate views of Christian truth have their uses. Traditional beliefs are often crudely expressed. It is well that we should be compelled to define our meaning with greater precision. And such views, even if unexpressed, are probably part of the process by which instinctive acceptance or submission to authority passes into rational faith.

It is because I believe, not because I

have misgivings about, the Catholic Faith, that I am willing to meet with an open mind all serious efforts to examine afresh the relation between the truth which it conveys and the basis of fact upon which it rests. I am, too, well aware how such articles of the Apostles' Creed as "Born of the Virgin Mary" and "I believe in the forgiveness of sins" have been reconstructing themselves in my own mind in relation to modern habits of thought, not to be assured that current discussions are but the travail through which they are establishing themselves upon a ground not of positive but of rational authority. The Christians of the new age will believe not less, but more, than their fathers.

I have said that the problem of miracles is perennial. But the way in which it is approached will vary according to the intellectual atmosphere in which it is raised. It would be well, if it were possible, to avoid the term. It suggests that the difference between the events which it denotes and the common experiences of life is fundamental. Never define miracles, if you want to avoid abstract discussions

that may turn out to be wholly irrelevant to the main issue. That so notorious a sceptic as David Hume should have defined a miracle as "a violation of the laws of nature" is no reason why we should be betrayed into similar dogmatism. It has been customary to regard the actions or occurrences, to which such definitions are held to apply, as certificates authenticating a revelation. "I bring you a message from GOD," says the prophet, "and I confirm it with signs following. By the performance of deeds, which no man unless endowed with occult powers can hope to imitate, I establish the truth of my utterances." The greatest minds—our own Butler is an example—have not so limited their point of view. Most of Butler's contemporaries, whether they denied or defended the miraculous, were practically content to look no further; and some persons even in our own day have followed their example.

Now there is a sense in which this aspect of the question cannot be altogether excluded. No candid reader of the New Testament can fail to admit that the primitive Christians recognized the evidential value of exceptional

powers. "They went forth, and preached everywhere, the LORD working with them and confirming the Word by the signs that followed" are the last words of the Marcan postscript. The principle is too deeply seated in human nature to be dismissed as credulity. We conjecture of the worker by the work. All creative activity is evidential. "The heavens declare the glory of GOD." Our LORD Himself attested by signs His authority to forgive sins. But "the spacious firmament on high" was not created in order that it might proclaim its "great Original" to the sons of men. Nor is the meaning of the healing of the paralytic at Capernaum exhausted by its value as a reply to the criticism of the Scribes and Pharisees. It is impossible to view the ministry of our Saviour as a whole—His refusal to make stones bread, His reluctance to do mighty works, the frequent exhortations to silence addressed to those who were the recipients of His mercy, His withdrawal from the crowds, His growing concentration upon a purpose repugnant to the conceptions which even His chosen followers had formed of a Redeemer—without becoming

convinced that what is of permanent and paramount importance to the Christian is *not the miracle, but the fact.* Whether JESUS performed miracles is not of primary importance. Whether the events set forth in the historic creeds, not as attestations of the Gospel, but as themselves that Gospel, did in fact take place—that is the real issue. In other words, the question with which as believers we are concerned is not whether these events are miracles, but whether these events are facts.

The Apostles regarded themselves as witnesses of the Resurrection. That is the first form in which the proclamation of the Gospel was made. But S. Peter on the day of Pentecost is only expressing in a different way what S. Paul, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, means by "CHRIST Crucified." "We preach CHRIST crucified," that is the message. They preached "JESUS and the Resurrection"; not the resurrection as a ratification of the good tidings, or as evidence of its reality, but JESUS, through the Resurrection, exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour.

To those who accept this Gospel it matters

little how they conceive of the event, which is its pivot, so long as they acknowledge it. One man may be convinced that the Resurrection will some day receive a scientific explanation. Another may regard it as an example of higher law, in due sequence with ordinary facts, but transcending them. To a third it may appear as an interruption of the laws of nature, a violation of its order, wrought by the mere will of an omnipotent GOD. A fourth may rather view it as arising out of the control of natural forces by spiritual personality, comparable to human intervention in the physical world. Some may recognize, with S. Paul, that JESUS was marked off as the SON of GOD by the Resurrection, while to others it may scarcely appear in the light of an evidence at all. No doubt the fact which consummates our redemption has many aspects, many subsidiary functions. But the main point upon which we must insist is that for Christians the Resurrection is the triumph that leads death captive, just as the faith which receives it is the victory that overcomes the world. This would be equally true if the work of CHRIST had been accomplished

in secret. Butler reminds us that there are what he calls "invisible miracles." He gives the Incarnation as an instance—"which, being secret, cannot be alleged as a proof" of CHRIST's mission. If we were so rash as to embark on definitions of the miraculous, it might indeed be a matter for discussion whether we could rightly speak of what is "invisible" as a miracle at all. That is a matter of terminology. But the point is that here we have Butler distinctly declaring that the central belief of Christians regarding the person of our LORD, with which he would, of course, have connected His birth from a virgin, involves the acceptance of facts that cannot in the nature of the case have the support of direct testimony. It is the fact that GOD became Man, the fact that He rose from the dead, just as it is the fact that He ever lives to make intercession for us, and not the extraordinary character of the fact, which is of primary importance.

I have to some extent anticipated the subject of my third lecture in what is here said, because it is the reality of the Resurrection on which the interest of the Christian actually centres. But the whole earthly

activity of CHRIST is involved in the discussion. And, again I say, it is what JESUS did rather than how He did it with which we are chiefly concerned.

Now the consideration of the works of CHRIST as facts involves a point of view almost the exact opposite from that which isolates them as miracles. We are apt to think of them, in consequence of the controversies which have raged around them, as though they were single acts, unrelated to their antecedents and consequences. In so doing we assimilate what are called the miracles, in spite of the beneficent and redemptive quality by which they were invariably characterized, to those "wonders in the land of Egypt," "the fearful things" which the Book of Exodus attributes to Moses "by the Red Sea," and some of which are related to have been imitated by the Egyptians with their enchantments. There is little wonder that acts which interrupt and have no apparent links with the course of history should come to be regarded as violations of the order of nature, or arbitrary suspensions of its laws. They were exhibitions of power, which were redemptive,

rather than redemptive acts which were powerful. Consequently it has been the common method of apologetic to establish as a principle that such alleged breaches of natural law were possible, and under certain conditions to be expected, and then to show that the evidence, if not even better than that on which an ordinary fact of history is accepted, was at least as good. But most intelligent people would surely agree that, if by a miracle be meant such a prodigy as the conversion of a mud-pie into a living bird, Hume was undoubtedly right when he laid it down in his famous canon "that no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish." Not only so, but such an activity as the resuscitation of a dead body, without any respect to the circumstances or connections in which it was alleged to have occurred, would be entirely destitute of meaning, and as such not entitled to credence. To be told that a man in Derbyshire rose from the grave yesterday could have no possible bearing upon life. It would leave the world

precisely as it found it. No results would flow from it. No modification of the *status quo* would follow upon its occurrence. Then why should I be called upon to believe that it happened? I have no use in my scheme of existence for an abstract miracle. The defect in a philosopher like Hume was not his logic and his penetration but the narrowness of his conception of the universe.

The situation is entirely altered in the case of the Resurrection of JESUS CHRIST. It is part of a great system, in relation to which it wears all the aspect of fact. If it could not have been anticipated, it yet stands in relation to the past, as does your appearance in the world or mine. It takes its place in the fabric or nexus of sequences, which are part of every event that can be called a fact, and must be taken into account in estimating its value. Every fact is something abstracted by the mind from the stream of existence, not a self-contained occurrence that can be insulated and estimated apart. It is both an end and a beginning, a cause and a consummation. Its ramifications are infinite. You may say that it is immaterial whether the Battle of

Waterloo really happened or not, so long as you accept the situation of Europe as it is to-day. But there is something unthinkable, unnatural I may call it, in any attempt to divorce the two. Waterloo is part of Europe as it is to-day, just as yonder tomb, unknown to Christopher Wren, is part of the crypt of S. Paul's, as we now know it. So too what are called the miracles of JESUS, crowned by the Resurrection, are part of Christendom, with all the triumphs, the faiths, the spiritual consequences of well-nigh two thousand years. It makes all the difference in the world whether I view the Resurrection of JESUS as an event which might just as well have occurred in the case of some unknown stranger in Thibet, or put a difference between the Holy Sepulchre and a grave to be dug in Kensal Green to-morrow. If I think of the Resurrection as a fact, I see it in relation to the whole development of which it is a part, the preparation in history for CHRIST, the unique character of JESUS of Nazareth, the whole series of experiences of which the Apostles were witnesses "beginning from the baptism of John," the phenomena of Christendom

from Pentecost to the present time, my own outlook upon life with the possibilities that it seems to me to hold.

So viewed there is nothing portentous in the life and work of CHRIST. It may be supernatural in the sense that its activities cannot be cramped within the limits of the axioms and definitions which are the necessary postulates of natural science. It may be supernatural in the sense that never man spake and wrought like this Man. We may indeed with the disciples ask the question, "What manner of Man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" But supernatural it ceases to be in the sense of disturbing the harmonies of the universe, of introducing us to a world which is not continuous with the world of our daily experience, or of requiring inconsistency of thought in the minds of those who would hold on to religion without ceasing to be practical.

If this is borne in mind it will become apparent that the sort of mechanical apologetic for miracle, which too often does duty for a real discussion of the subject, is entirely out of place. You cannot expect clear-cut and crushing arguments as the rational ground

upon which a belief in the supernatural CHRIST rests. These are never really possible in any matter that deals with practical life, and, as Butler reminds us, religion is essentially practical. There is no treatise to which I turn more readily than Butler's *Analogy* when I want to reassure myself with regard to the rational ground of faith. It is a mighty triumph of human intelligence, differing by a whole heaven from the narrow and antiquated logic of Paley. No doubt the language which Butler uses is that of a century which knew nothing of the aeroplane or the cinematograph. No doubt he was limited by the forms of thought current in his own time, and readjustment is often necessary before we can detect the real value of his thought in relation to modern habits of mind. But I rarely come across any truth in the systems of fashionable philosophers, immanental or vitalist, which does not seem to have been to some extent anticipated in the *Analogy* or the *Sermons at the Rolls*. And his surpassing merit is this, that, unlike Paley, he never appears to smash his opponents or to suppose for an instant that a matter so universal in its bearings as Chris-

tianity can be made to rest on a narrow basis of irrefragable demonstration. There is only one branch of knowledge from the conclusions of which there is no escape, and that is mathematics. But this is only because the conclusions are contained in the premisses. In proportion as they approach the exactness of mathematics, the utility of the physical sciences increases, and, paradoxical as it sounds, the more nearly these sciences resemble mathematics, the further they are from actual life. What people care most about, what they are most ready to fight for, what they feel to be truest and most vital, are the very things where accuracy of this kind is lowest. And of these interests religion is the most fundamental. In order to be rational religious conviction must rest on grounds infinitely wider than those from which honest thought cannot escape.

In considering the supernatural history of Christianity, we are not concerned with problems in the air. We are not asked to discuss whether miracles are possible, and, if possible, whether they will probably occur. We are not required to speculate whether a revelation is conceivable, and, if

so, what form it is likely to take, and what are the necessary conditions. Such questions, if we shut out all reference to Christianity as an actual fact, admit of no satisfactory answer, and may be classed with all preconceived notions of GOD and creation, of the origin of evil and the relation between omnipotence and freewill. From such airy speculations we "return" to use once again the words of Butler, "to the earth our habitation." The great realm of fact and the necessity of practical action in regard to it is antecedent to all theories. There is a sense in which all these problems are involved in any attempt to sort the facts. But so far as our conclusions are theoretical, they are governed by the particular situation in which we find ourselves. The practical issues of life demand the formation of convictions and the exercise of faith in cases where, if the speculative reason were alone concerned, the Scots verdict of "not proven" might be deemed sufficient. And we are confronted with JESUS CHRIST as an integral part of the world's experience, not His teaching mainly or even primarily, but His personality and life work, which press for

the response of an active surrender on the part of all to whom they are presented. If I were asked to accept the fact that nineteen hundred years ago there lived a man who healed sick folk, who raised the dead, and who, having been crucified, rose from the grave on the third day—if I were told that all this was established upon evidence, the like of which for strength and cogency would hang a criminal ten times over in any civilized country, I should refuse to burden my mind with the consideration of a narrative which had no bearing on actual life. But the religion of JESUS is still a living issue. These Gospels, and a long train of consequences which flow out of them, are part of the actual experience of the world. Some explanation of Christianity must be given, and the explanation must be adequate to the fact. If I deny that the Battle of Trafalgar took place, but am forced to admit that in the same year, and more or less at the same place, a naval engagement was fought in which the French fleet was crushed and Nelson fell, I think I may as well consent to call my victory Trafalgar. It is this pressure of the whole system of Christianity

that I want you to consider—its claim, its results, the interrelation of its parts, its bearings upon life and thought, its correspondence with human needs, its unique character, the view of life which it presents when it is fitted into its place in the conditions under which our existence is passed. When we hear of men hesitating to commit themselves to a supernatural CHRIST, we may well inquire how much of this hesitation is due to an imperfect realization of Christianity itself. Those who with S. Paul enter into the meaning of the New Creation will not feel it to be incredible that GOD should raise the dead. But there are others, who see only a partial universe, because they can make no venture of faith.

This way of approaching the whole matter of the miraculous element in Christianity seems to me to leave us singularly free to consider the documents which the New Testament contains in the spirit of historical inquiry. So long as the miracles appear merely as supernatural works attesting the truth of a revelation, it is not unnatural that in a critical age the discovery of imperfections in the full and complete attestation of each

miraculous narrative should lead to nervous apprehension lest the whole Christian fabric should crumble to pieces. But the very fact that from the first faith has built itself upon the Resurrection is the best guarantee that the supernatural basis is secure.

Let me explain. It is acknowledged, even by those who have thrown doubt upon what the ordinary man would call the value of the testimony, that those to whom the Apostles first gave their witness, no less than Christians of the second and succeeding centuries, based their discipleship upon that faith which is expressed in the words of the Apostles' Creed, "The third day He rose again from the dead." It was not the object of the Apostles, even if the idea could have been presented to them, to set on record, as it were, under their sign manual, a legally-attested and sworn account of the Resurrection, which could never be upset, as a warrant of the truth of the Gospel, but to preach the crucified and risen CHRIST, as justifying the believer. "CHRIST died for our sins, and rose again for our justification." So S. Paul puts it. Those who received the witness had the immediate attestation of the Spirit.

The new life followed upon the preaching and reception of the Word. What the first disciples had to do was to get their preaching accepted—no matter how—and they did. They had to say enough to awaken that faith which would lay the lives of their hearers open to the influences of the Spirit of the Risen CHRIST. This is precisely what the preacher of the Gospel has attempted in every age. Men believed, as they still believe, the Word spoken. By Baptism they were knit into the fellowship of Christian disciples, in which the Spirit of JESUS became the abiding witness to the Resurrection.

Here lies the fallacy of such a book as *When it was Dark*, which imagines the discovery of documentary evidence purporting to contradict the story of the New Testament. The futility of the supposition that any such discovery would upset the Christian religion consists in the fact, not that religion is independent of the reality of the Resurrection, but that the ground upon which the Resurrection is believed lies deeper than mere documents. If CHRIST did not rise from the dead, as the Evangelists record, then He did something

which was so exactly like it that the words of the Apostles' Creed are the only phraseology which is adequate to express what did occur —"On the third day He rose again."

I hope I have made this sufficiently clear. We ought to understand how entirely we are set free to examine and report upon the four Gospels, as on the rest of the New Testament, in a spirit which is as much that of free inquiry as the spirit with which we approach the manuscripts of Virgil or Thucydides. I believe that the Gospels present to us the historical CHRIST. I believe that He is rightly represented as a supernatural, or, if you prefer the term, a supranormal figure. I believe that Christianity grew out of the fact in which His activity culminates—His Resurrection on the third day from the dead. But that is quite another thing from saying that everything must have happened precisely as the Gospels represent it. These writings are historical documents, and, for that reason, are subject to the conditions under which such documents come into existence. Those who composed them were not exempt from the ordinary psychological laws of memory, observation, and

inference, of which we must take account in the criticism of all similar documents. Just because Christianity is a historical religion it is positively reassuring to find that the testimony upon which we receive it is not exempt from the common characteristics of historical narrative. In considering what are collectively called "the miracles," we are not dealing with a series of actions all of which must conform to some preconceived type, take their place within the limits of a prearranged definition, and exhibit one presupposed purpose. We are not whittling away the supernatural element in JESUS' personality if in one case or another we venture to suspect that the form in which the story is presented to the reader owes something to the personal equation of the narrator or to other accidents of transmission. The very fact that CHRIST was recognized as surpassing the common limitations of human activity would easily lead to interpretations of His actions calculated to remove them as far as may be from ordinary experience, even in cases where an explanation more akin to that experience is clearly not impossible. We know how in the second century romance

became so busy with His personality that miracles accepted by nobody were attributed to His childhood in the so-called Apocryphal Gospels. Is it not possible that the tendency was always present, and may be detected in the canonical Gospels themselves? I do not say that this is so, and I want no one to leave the Crypt this evening supposing that I am seeking to discredit any of the narratives they record. All I do say is that I am quite prepared to approach these questions with an open mind, and to arrive at a conclusion which, so far as my judgement goes, is most in accordance with general probability in each particular instance.

Take one or two examples. The story of the coin in the fish's mouth bears a sufficient resemblance to the apocryphal and later ecclesiastical miracles to make it possible to hold that it is not fully historical. Many people—I am not myself of the number—experience an ethical difficulty when they encounter the story of the Gadarene swine, which formed the topic of the famous controversy between Huxley and Gladstone. We ought not to say that those who find it hard to accept the record as it stands are

animated simply by disbelief in the supernatural personality of JESUS. The raising of the daughter of Jairus and the widow's son at Nain may have occurred exactly as they are described by the Synoptists, but our knowledge either of death in general or the special circumstances, under which these persons were held to have entered that state, is not sufficient to enable us to say dogmatically that either of them was actually recalled from the world of spirits. It is usually supposed that the Feeding of the Five Thousand can only be interpreted on the theory that JESUS there and then created a supply of bread and fish, by causing the loaves to swell and the dried fishes to multiply their substance, if it is not to be explained away as a materialization of the Saviour's teaching concerning the Bread of life. What are we to say if it is suggested that JESUS did take the five barley loaves and two small fishes, that He did procure food for the multitude through the exercise of His wonderful personality, yet not by means of what looks like a portentous exercise of power?

I do not wish to be understood to deny

that the half-shekel was discovered in the fish's mouth, that the widow's son was dead in fact as well as in appearance, that JESUS literally multiplied the loaves. All I desire to make plain is that CHRIST is a living Person—not a lay figure—and that those portions of the narrative in which He is presented as a transcendent Being are not a series of stereotyped miracles mechanically wrought to prove Him divine. That Christianity is bound up with history is unquestionable. We can no more make our religion independent of it than we can make stones bread. But it is with the facts through which GOD has wrought redemption, and the consequences of which are all around us to-day, that the Christian believer is concerned. *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice.* These facts are not affected by the accuracy of the observation or the correctness of the information which underlies every detail of the Gospel narrative. Such matters we may leave with absolute confidence to the elucidation of Biblical science.

II

MIRACLE AND PERSONALITY

THE modern conception of the universe has been slowly built up during the last three centuries upon a basis of exact thought closely wedded to observed fact, which was impossible before the world had learned the rigorous processes of scientific method. What has been called the conflict between religion and natural science has largely arisen out of the circumstance that the former rests upon a foundation of facts broader and more universal than those which come within the scope of the latter. From the point of view of the physical investigator theology has seemed to rely upon an assumed theory of the universe, disproved by his own inductive method, and positively hindering its application to the proper subjects of his inquiry. The point to remember is that,

prior to the Renaissance and the age of Francis Bacon, practical life in all its departments was directed by knowledge gained indeed from the observation of facts but by methods, good enough for the satisfaction of current needs, yet as inaccurate and therefore as ill-adapted for progressive development as those which to-day distinguish the man in the street from the experimental philosopher.

Life always begins with the satisfaction of the most elementary needs—what men must eat and drink, and wherewithal they must be clothed. These needs may be called elementary, simply because they are universally felt and acknowledged; while it is not all who can receive the exhortation to seek first the kingdom of GOD. And it is with the natural sciences that the reconstruction of knowledge begins. This means, in the first instance, a rigid delimitation of area. The world, as it is made known to us through the avenue of the senses, what in technical language is called the phenomenal world, must be isolated, and each fact which composes it must be isolated, from all considerations of its origin, purpose, or destiny.

This is what Bacon meant when he laid it down that inductive science has nothing to do with final causes, the admission of which tend only to warp criticism. It does not, in the least, matter whether earth and sky and sea were made by GOD, or came into being as the result of irrational causes; whether, as Lucretius thought, the forms and shapes of things were brought about by a swerve in the course of the rushing atoms; or whether a designing mind fixed the kinds and species of created things, with a view to the attainment of mutually related purposes. But if we want to discover the *how*, and not the *why* of existence, we shall only hinder the progress of investigation by assuming a design or purpose which may turn out on minuter examination to be entirely inconsistent with the mechanism of the substance or object with which we are dealing. There must be no prejudices when we apply the inductive method.

Now, as I said, we begin by limiting the area of our inquiries. It is, of course, true that in so doing we are drawing a line that has no existence in nature. As Mr. Balfour has repeatedly insisted, natural science is

built upon assumptions that do not take us to the heart of reality. Atoms, protoplasm, or whatever terms be employed to designate the stuff of the material world, are taken for granted, are accepted as articles of faith. On the other hand, the extraordinary discoveries of the present age, which have given us radium and the like, seem almost to dissipate solidity into forms of motion, which imagination fails to picture as having any tangible or what the unsophisticated mind would call real existence. The proper justification of natural science is not the theoretical realities which it establishes, but the practical certainties to which it leads. By its aid we can forecast, modify, and develop the conditions under which we live. Of its methods no one would venture to question the validity.

But, in holding the mirror up to nature, physical science is incapable of giving a complete representation of reality. The picture that it gives has been compared by Bergson in *Creative Evolution* to the records of the cinematograph. These, as all are aware, are nothing but still photographs, following each other in such rapid succession, and

representing states of the constantly-shifting scene so close to one another as to offer the illusion of exhibiting the movement itself. But, whereas in the original the transformation is a continuous flow between the pictures which the instrument registers, there are spaces which are lost in the effect as it is thrown upon the screen. A swift mechanical succession produces the illusion of an organic development. In the reality there is infinitely more than is actually reproduced in the representation : the record is an abstraction from the whole. And just as in the cinematograph you have not got the real movement, so in physical science you fail to reach the real cause. You have no more solved the problem why these successions should take place, why nothing should have occurred to set up another succession, than you can tell how the whole material frame of things should have come into being at all.

And this is what Butler means when he says that probability, and not demonstrative certainty, is the guide of life. Science can tell you that, if certain conditions obtain to-morrow, certain results will follow. If

the sun rises to-morrow, as usual, certain calculations will hold good. But there is no law known to the investigator which makes it inevitable that the sun will rise. In fact, the whole conception of law is foreign to exact science altogether. Law in a scientific sense means only observed uniformity. We are perfectly justified in arguing from analogy that the future will resemble the past, that present conditions will continue where there is no positive reason to suppose that they will be altered. But that things must remain as they are is a proposition that experience contradicts.

But for the ordinary purposes of physical life this mechanical view of existence is sufficient. If you are content to be ignorant of the ultimate causes and the moral purposes which life serves, if you are troubled to ask no questions about your own personality and to take yourself for granted as a being whose wants are sufficiently satisfied by contrivances which enable you to enjoy bodily pleasures and avert bodily pains, you will demand nothing more than a method of inquiry which enables you to arrange and classify the phenomena of physical experi-

ence with an ever-increasing precision. If you have no desire to overcome the world, but only to adapt yourself to it, you will have no use for any fact that does not enable you to handle nature so as to get as much out of the oyster as you are able to extract. It is in the normal that you are interested, in the events that can be made to repeat themselves. You are only concerned with those aspects of reality to which the method of natural science applies. This is the mechanical view of the world.

Large numbers of men remain, either consciously or unconsciously, agnostic with regard to the larger world outside these narrow grooves. No doubt a pure agnosticism, as George Romanes reminded us, will go on to discover that it is failing to give an account of a multitude of facts that will not consent to cramp themselves within the limits of scientific inquiry, using the word scientific in the popular sense, and will recognize the necessity of examining and classifying these facts. But, after all, time and opportunity are limited, and there is little wonder that the study of physical nature should be so absorbing to

the specialist as to run the risk of becoming his whole world. But we are bound to protest against the illegitimate assumption that the same axioms hold good for existence considered as a whole as for that section which we abstract from the sum total of things and call the inorganic world. What is known as determinism—the philosophic system of which Mr. Blatchford is a popular exponent—is a sublime assumption for which not only is there no evidence whatever, but which seems to juggle with what the plain man would naturally infer from the practical experience of life. For the purposes of natural science we are bound to assume a chain of causation, in which certain physical antecedents necessarily issue in certain physical results. When one part of carbon mingles with two parts of oxygen the result is inevitable—carbonic dioxide, and death to any living beings that are immersed in it. A body that is heavier than air will fall to the ground, and it will go hardly with any one who is trusting to it for support. But this appearance of necessity is only reached by eliminating the "if" that applies to all development. Scientific necessity will never

make it certain that the workings of a particular mine will be filled with noxious fumes to-morrow, that a particular projection shall be detached from a cliff on Monday while I am perched upon it. My business and yours is by contrivance and forethought to make these contingencies impossible. A scientific account of every activity by which this audience and its lecturer have assembled in the Crypt this evening could, no doubt, be given ; but it is quite another thing to say that, if we only knew it, you and I are every bit as much automatons as Mr. Maskelyne's ingenious dolls.

More than a century and a half ago Butler made it clear that for all practical purposes the doctrine of necessity, that mechanical fatalism resulting from the machine theory of the universe popular in the eighteenth century, was a gratuitous assumption. If an architect builds a house, it makes no difference for practical purposes whether he builds it of his own mere motion or by necessity. The services of the public executioner will be requisitioned in the case of the murderer, and determinism may go hang along with him.

Practical considerations protest at every turn against this unproved assumption, and that was Butler's justification for turning it out of doors. Both thought and action, in so far as we examine them from the point of view of our own experience, are free. We strike out for ourselves, like the swimmer who spreads forth his hands to swim. So a modern philosopher, whose reasoning powers are those of a razor which was never meant to cut blocks—Mr. Arthur Balfour — writes thus in the Decennial Number of the *Hibbert Journal*:

"To the naturalistic thinker there is no absolute and no soul. Psychic phenomena are a function of the nervous system. The nervous system is material, and obeys the laws of matter. Its behaviour is as rigidly determined as the planetary orbits, and might be accurately deduced by a being sufficiently endowed with powers of calculation from the distribution of matter, motion, and force, when the solar system was still nebular. To me, who am neither idealist nor naturalist, freedom is a reality; partly because, on ethical grounds, I am not prepared to give it up; partly because

anything which, like 'naturalism' requires reason to be mechanically determined, is (I believe) essentially incoherent; and if we abandon mechanical determinism in the case of reason, it seems absurd to retain it in the case of will; partly because it seems impossible to find room for the self and its psychic states in the interstices of a rigid sequence of material causes and effects."

Mr. Balfour is right. We do not need to construct any theories of the principles that govern the universe in order to be assured that the narrow theory of the mere "naturalist" is a bed of Procrustes, shorter than a man can stretch himself upon. "We are not agents," said Malebranche, "but only spectators, even of our own history." He might have added, if the doctrine of determinism be true, "and incapable of an independent judgement at that." Nevertheless, men will go on both working and thinking, as though they were self-determining, creative beings. And to my mind that is the best warrant that they have for believing themselves so to be.

The truth is that we can only get a really

consistent view of the whole universe if we admit that there are, at least, two levels at which a new and independent view of life may be gained, and a fresh start made in the interpretation of it. One is the level of organic life, which comes into view when we study plants and animals. The other is personal activity, which dominates the situation as soon as we take into account the activity of man. It is only when we reach the latter that miracle, as we term the supranormal element in the Christian revelation, becomes fully intelligible.

We have spoken of the first view of life, the inorganic and mechanical. The second view, that which accompanies the investigation of organisms, we may call the immanental. It is a view that transcends the purely mechanical without wholly escaping from its limitations. The study of biology has done more than anything else to familiarize the popular mind with this way of thinking. For biology differs from the inorganic sciences in this, that it contemplates existence in motion, in progress, in history. In other words, its view is dynamic rather than static. It observes the world not as it is at any given

moment, but as it is becoming throughout a tract of time. The eye runs along, so to speak, rather than fixes its gaze. It watches the plant unfolding, the bones of the animal growing in the womb. An organism is a structure that expands by an inward principle or process of life. It is not constructed by an external architect, but transformed by an immanent force. The view of the universe thus suggested is infinitely truer to all the facts than that of the mere atomic philosopher. The idea of fixed and unalterable laws disappears with the conception of the world as a self-contained machine, made up of complex adjustments like a watch or a steam-engine. Those who know anything of Darwinian habits of thought—and who that has lived through the last thirty years can altogether have escaped them?—can fail to realize that it is a living and not a dead universe to which we have been introduced, that rigid outlines and cast-iron theories have disappeared, and that a more spiritual, and as we cannot but feel nobler conception of life has emerged.

But the theory of an immanent life manifesting itself in the forms and shapes, the

shades and colours of a manifold universe, is in reality subject to all the limitations that have invariably beset Pantheism. It is inadequate for ethical life because it has no higher sanction for morality than the public opinion which is the only conscience of naturalism. Spiritualize her as you will, Mrs. Grundy is Mrs. Grundy still, and there is nothing imperative in her criticisms. Moreover, the excursions of our friends of the New Theology into the realms of a purely immanent theory of GOD have emphasized once again the great and important truth, that moral distinctions will never be sufficiently sharp and clear where divinity is identified with the life that manifests itself in everything. And what is true for moral life is true also for reason and thought. On this theory GOD and the phenomenal world are tied to one another by a chain, which leaves no real independence to either. The possibilities may be greater than we are able to conceive under a hard, external, mechanical system. But there is no real place for revelation, and therefore none for miracle. Such theories were well criticized by James Martineau, a

quarter of a century ago, in the spring-time of English Hegelianism and of those biological forms of thought which followed upon the publication of the *Origin of Species*. His criticism stands to-day.

"We gain," he declares, "no scope for moral agency by removal into the immanental metaphysics, i.e., by merely thinking of the world as the manifestation of an inward life rather than as a succession of material phenomena.

"The dual composition of the universe out of Thought and Extension, the joint expressions of GOD, which form parallel chains of separate causation, turns up in man, and makes his constitution of mind and body a partnership of two necessities. His life is made up of their synchronous histories, written in distinct columns, side by side; and, by skilled observers, any unseen phenomena in one may be inferred, either from its antecedent in its own line or its companion in the other. Alternative there is none; and what seems uncertainty in human things is but indistinctness in our vision of them, the wavering guesses we make at objects obscured by floating mist."

The point of that judgement is this. The universe remains just as much a rounded, enclosed system, whether we regard our consciousness merely as the reflex of the nervous system, which has somehow become cognizant of itself, but which is nevertheless nothing more than our material organization wakened into sentient life, or whether we treat life as the sum total of psychical existence realizing itself in the various forms and functions of organized matter. There is no beginning and no end. As Spinoza put it, there is nothing possible except the actual. There is no forward movement, no creative power, no choice, no better and worse, nothing but the unseen everywhere manifested. In the long run the two theories of being, the mechanical and the immanental, come to precisely the same thing. There is no meaning in life, because this change and development, of which we are apparently aware, are but the shaking of a kaleidoscope.

Now, what we have to say about this immanental view is that, like the mechanical it is up to a certain point a true reading of experience, and represents an aspect of life.

The mechanical view is sufficiently valid for the ordinary purposes of natural science, which can only advance if it looks steadily at the "fact" submitted to it, leaving out of account all considerations that are not immediately relevant to the purposes of observation and experiment. In the same way, history, which is not concerned with human life in all its issues and possibilities, but only with the actual activities of men, as they have already worked themselves out on the stage of the visible, phenomenal world, finds a sufficient basis in a theory of immanence, which allows for the play of the mental and vital powers of mankind, as they rearrange and redistribute the elements which compose the world, utilizing, directing, and bringing into play the material forces. History is not concerned with the question whether personal action adds anything to the sum of existence, whether it uses the material it finds ready to its hand in order to create new things, or whether it is only transforming old energies into fresh forms and merely regrouping old facts in a manifold system of permutations. History, like science, is abstract. It does not cover

the whole of reality. Its value as "a possession for ever" rests upon the normal character of the activities with which it deals, upon the capacity of the student to observe uniformities in human action, to interpret events by assigning causes according to the motives and ideas that govern human conduct. The historian has nothing to do with what might have been, with that mental balance which precedes action, but with the series of events as they have actually issued. Wellington was guided by certain motives when he occupied the farm at Hougomont, and this particular determination of the Commander-in-chief had an important, if not a decisive, bearing upon the victory of Waterloo. But what has history to do with the thousand and one influences which may have been operating upon him before the momentous decision was taken? He might have decided differently, and then history would have been different.

My point is that we have no right to say that what has occurred was inevitable from the beginning. Again, you are juggling with the simple facts of practical experience if you say that what I, in the consciousness

of my personality, recognize as choice, as the free and spontaneous act of my own creative will, is a determination which I could not avoid, because I am part of an evolving life, the progress of which is determined by the laws of motive, of mind, of psychic existence. That is sophistry. It admits of no sort of proof. It is just stretching a view of life, legitimate enough for certain purposes, to explain what it cannot explain. You must find a larger view of life if it is to be adequate to the whole of reality, so far as we know it.

Nothing is more remarkable than the way in which not only philosophers but men of science are feeling their way cautiously, but none the less surely, towards a higher reading of the problem of existence. Biology has been gradually impressing its lessons alike on the uninitiated world and on its own hierophants. The investigator is as sure as ever he was that it is the plain duty of scientific inquiry to follow the beaten track of observation and experiment, as unprejudiced as ever Bacon was by the consideration of final causes. He still recognizes the close relations that must ever

subsist between the subject of his study and the sciences that lead him downwards — physiology, chemistry, physics, mathematics. But he realizes that his eye must be turned upwards also.

"On the whole," says Mr. D'Arcy Thompson, in his presidential address to the Zoological section of the British Association, in 1911, "I think it is very manifest that there is abroad on all sides a greater spirit of hesitation and caution than of old, and that the lessons of the philosopher have had their influence on our minds. We realize that the problem of development is far harder than we had begun to let ourselves suppose: that the problems of organogeny and phylogeny (as well as those of physiology) are not comparatively simple and well-nigh solved, but are of the most formidable complexity. And we would, most of us, confess with the learned author of *The Cell in Development and Inheritance* that we are utterly ignorant of the manner in which the substance of the germ-cell can so respond to the influence of the environment as to call forth an adaptive variation; and again, that the gulf between the lowest forms

of life and the inorganic world is as wide, if not wider, than it seemed a couple of generations ago."

This admission is as frank as it is careful. It means that the old phrases, such as natural selection and survival of the fittest, which in the early days of modern evolutionary theory, seemed to take the place of purpose in the interpretation of history, are coming to be recognized as little more than a restatement of the ultimate problem, and that men are returning to the testimony of consciousness for light upon the meaning of the universe. Thus we are led on to the third or personal view. We must interrogate our own experience. Of what do I become aware in the activities of my own thinking, willing, conscious self? Should I not say, if I were not overawed by the great name of some other thinker, whether philosopher or man of science, that the world, with which I am brought into touch through the avenue of my senses, existed for me just as much as I existed for it? Should I not think of my personality as entrusted with the objects of sense, with what I call the world of matter, as a

field, albeit a limited one, upon which to operate by the exercise of thought, choice, and will? Should I for a moment think of my own reason as other than a free agent, passing judgement on the facts submitted to it? Should I not regard myself as modifying this world of phenomena by the action of my own deliberate choice? All my ideas of creation are based upon my own conscious efforts. If I cannot do whatsoever pleases me, I am every day making new things, exercising a living will, putting my thought into things, spoiling them if you like, but making something out of them? Does not the future exist in my mind before it achieves reality in the outward world? I know, of course, that "the best-laid schemes of mice and men gang oft agley." That will keep me humble. And yet this very lecture, which I am delivering to you this afternoon, is something that has come out of myself. I have used my materials. I have put myself into it. And here it is, not altogether a failure! It is something added to the world, not without pain, not without travail, not without expenditure of effort. If you

tell me that it could not have been different, could not have been better, could not have been worse, I shall not believe you. I am a creator, and I know it. What I have achieved, however poorly, is in relation to the material, with which and upon which I have worked, a miracle. I have struck out into what an hour ago was the future, the uncertain, but (shall I say) for my living will, the impossible. Of course it was.

It is such considerations as these that are driving men in the present day to a more complete, a fuller, a more accurate conception of the universe, and that is the *Personal*. We are interrogating our own consciousness afresh, and finding in it by a more exact analysis of our daily experience, something that gives us a bigger need of life than that which is required by those who study science or write history. The view of life which is beginning to present itself to the men of this generation is the very reverse of that which looks downward, as Bacon said that physical science looked, to the certainties, the uninteresting certainties, of mathematics. It is vital, real, living.

These thoughts are in the air to-day. They are not the possession of any one thinker. In one book after another I see them reflected. If I refer to Henri Bergson, it is only because his name is now familiar to the British public, his philosophy summarized in every newspaper, his writings reviewed in every magazine. I do not pretend as yet to have made an extended study of his system. Nor do I suppose that, if I had, I should feel that the last word had been said on the problems with which he deals. I merely take him as typical of that tendency to reassert the importance of personality in any systematic view of the universe. And remember that in our day we are not building philosophic castles in the air, but beginning in truly scientific form with what is nearest to ourselves—experience. Let me give you one short paragraph in which Bergson sums up his position.

"All the lines of facts we follow," he says, "seem to converge on the same point, a point at which we seem to see the following image arise: On the one hand, matter subject to necessity, a kind of

immense machine, without memory, or at least having just sufficient memory to bridge the interval between one instant and the next, each of the states of the material world being capable, or almost so, of mathematical deduction from the previous state, and consequently adding nothing thereto; on the other hand *consciousness* —that is to say, on the contrary, *a force essentially free and essentially memory*, a force whose very character is to pile up the past, like a rolling snowball, and at every instant of duration to organize with this past something new which is a real creation."

What I want you to see in this statement is evidence of the trend of thought towards realizing the universe conceived in its totality as the sphere in which creative personality, not in man only, is producing something in the evolutionary process, taking up matter and using it for ends that are beyond itself. Creation is not on this view an initial act by which a rational agent in a far distant past constructed the world as a great machine which grinds on independently in virtue of the clockwork of which it is composed. Nor yet is it re-

garded as a power station for the liberation and transmission of an energy, which has been once for all infused into the universe as its living principle. But creation is something constantly repeating itself at every moment of the world's history, just as your action and mine transcends while it is immanent in the fabric of matter which it guides, controls, and uses for its own purposes.

This is the way that Christianity has always conceived of the living GOD. The difficulties which men feel about miracles, so long as they think of GOD only as a Being existing statically outside this frame of things, which is normally controlled by laws impressed upon it from the beginning, or by the capacities of its own inherent life, disappear, so soon as it is perceived that all these ideas are gratuitous assumptions, that we have no right to go beyond what we know of matter and say that it is a system complete in itself, nicely rounded off and adjusted, so that what is supranormal does violence to its ordered life. Intervention there may be, not interruption. Personal action is dynamic, bending

matter to ends superior to itself. Who shall say where this capacity ends even for man, still less for GOD? If the word miracle is to be used at all, then everything spiritual is, from the point of view of matter, regarded as a thing in itself, miraculous. Christianity means that the Personality of GOD has intervened in history for the salvation of men. Who shall say, previous to experience, how He should bend the material universe to what from our point of view is the great purpose of recreating mankind in CHRIST?

III

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

THE pivot of the Christian religion is the belief that on the third day JESUS rose from the dead. Let me begin by reminding you that it is the fact itself, and not the extraordinary character of the fact, which is of crucial importance. The Risen CHRIST is the substance of Christianity. It meets us in every development of Christian teaching. It is in virtue of the Resurrection that we believe in reconciliation with GOD and the forgiveness of sins. The Resurrection is alike the pledge and the source of our incorporation into CHRIST, so that the life of JESUS and the power of His Spirit quicken our mortal bodies. It is because JESUS died and rose again, that we sorrow not as men that have no hope for them that sleep in Him. The prayer of every true believer

is "that I may know Him and the power of His Resurrection." The victory to which we look through death, with a confidence that we are sure will not be disappointed, is the final revelation of the Saviour, "Who shall change the body of our humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto the body of His glory." The Resurrection flashes like a diamond with countless facets from every page of the epistles of S. Paul. It is the Gospel in its most concentrated form.

It is a fact of history established beyond dispute that the Christian Society was built upon the conviction that JESUS of Nazareth, Who was crucified, rose again from the dead. The question we have now to discuss is, What does such a belief imply? What is the fact, in which we declare our belief, when we repeat, as an article of the Creed, "The third day He rose again from the dead?"

The answer is not quite so easy as appears on the surface. We are not dealing with a fact of ordinary experience, admitting of a plain "yes" or "no," for the simple reason that in the nature of the case it carries us

above the levels upon which we pass our daily existence, the "C major of this life," as Browning has called it. The narrative of the evangelists makes it sufficiently plain that CHRIST is not represented as returning, like Lazarus or the widow's son at Nain, to a life which is still mortal, to the interrupted threads of a career prematurely broken. It is the indissoluble life on which He has entered, and the assumptions alike of our religious faith and our Christian theology would be rendered nugatory by such a supposition. With unhesitating faith we say "He rose again," but the word "again" we use with a difference. He came back from death, but not to the conditions of our present state. If He manifested Himself to His disciples, they could not ask Him, "Master, where dwellest Thou?" nor could He reply, "Come and see." This consideration should at once restrain us from supposing that the Resurrection is an event which could appropriately be investigated in the atmosphere of a court of justice. It belongs to those deeper convictions of the human spirit which do not admit of plain questions and straight answers.

"Did you or did you not see the King at Victoria Station on Saturday?" is a question with which an indignant counsel may rightly assail a prevaricating witness. But you have no right to accuse of dishonesty any thinking Christian who asks you to define your meaning before he answers the question, "Did JESUS CHRIST rise from the dead, or did He not?"

I am particularly anxious to make this clear in view of the impatience with which many of us are apt to regard the suggestion that the Resurrection of our LORD did not involve the resuscitation of the corpse—as it would be phrased—which was laid in the sepulchre after the Crucifixion. If it be a clergyman who ventures upon such a theory, however tentatively, he is at once told that he occupies a false position, and that to retain his office is to eat the bread of dishonesty. Now in what I am about to say I shall endeavour to make clear my conviction that this view is a departure from the simplicity of the Christian Gospel, arising out of a conflict, in the minds of those who advance it, between attachment to Christianity and disbelief in miracle, and that to

admit it would in the long run involve the evaporation of Christian faith and hope. But, so far as I understand them, none of those to whom I refer maintain that nothing occurred after the death of CHRIST but the growth of an unverified opinion in the minds of the disciples that their Master was alive for evermore. The question is, not whether anything happened or not, but what it was that really happened. To me it is no easier to believe that JESUS appeared to the disciples in a form that they could distinguish from an apparition than it is to accept the Empty Tomb. But to hold some theory of the Resurrection corresponding to what might conceivably have happened, if it had been the custom of the Jews to burn and not to bury, is not at all the same thing as to deny it. And if we believe, as I suppose most of us do, and as S. Paul appears to teach,[1] that our resurrection will not involve any apparent connection between the particles composing our bodies at death and the spiritual bodies with which we shall then be clothed, we can understand, I think, how to some minds, especially if the exigencies of contemporary

[1] See Note A, p. 110.

thought assume disproportionate importance, a similar view of the Resurrection of CHRIST may seem not only tolerable but even necessary. If, however, it does not represent the fact, as I believe it does not, we may be confident that it is inadequate, and that, therefore, the Gospel is vitally concerned in the maintenance of a fuller acceptation of the Creed.

Try to realize the atmosphere in which S. Paul wrote his epistles. Think of the prejudices of his own Pharisaic past and the scandal of the Cross which inspired his bitter hostility to the Christian sect. Think also of the great antichristian world that surrounded the small societies of believers in the cities and seaports of the Roman Empire. There was no reserve of Christian experience upon which to draw. All the weight of that marvellous theology, which the elaborate systems of succeeding ages have not surpassed nor even approached, rests directly upon CHRIST. It is not Christian ideas, slowly working themselves out in the accumulating experience of the society, but facts, hard, solid facts, that enable him to anticipate, or rather to live through, a wealth of

spiritual experience. "If we believe that JESUS died and rose again," is the way he puts it in the very first of his letters. Each situation, as it arises, is met and explained in the same direct, straightforward way. If we believe this twofold fact, the Death and Resurrection of JESUS, we can speak confidently, dogmatically, certainly. We have the ounce of fact which is worth a ton of theory in deciding all the issues of life here and hereafter. S. Paul convinces you that it is not mere general conviction, based upon impressions of CHRIST'S personality, but direct deductions from events firmly held as actually having taken place, which give him this marvellous grip of the significance of JESUS.

But there are some who say that it is uncertain whether S. Paul believed in the Empty Tomb. That he did so believe seems to me not only probable but certain. Think of the language which he invariably uses to describe the truth which for him was central to Christianity. It is always the record of an event, not the assurance of a state. Those appearances of the living CHRIST, which he enumerates and in which he in-

cludes his own "vision," were not evidences of a condition but testimonies of a fact. S. Paul believed that JESUS had been marked off as the SON of GOD by the Resurrection, just as He had been born of the seed of David. The one belonged to the category of events as much as the other. "GOD raised Him from the dead" means something very different from "Though crucified and dead, He lives for evermore." No one would have dreamed of expressing his conviction of the living and glorified CHRIST in the particular form in which S. Paul, in common with the Creeds and the New Testament, generally expresses it, unless he had believed that an event had actually occurred. But we may go further and assert that this event had a direct connection with the tomb in which the Saviour had been buried. Consider the opening paragraph of the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. There we have a summary of the fundamental Christian tradition: "CHRIST died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and was buried and hath been raised on the third day." Observe the sequence, exactly like that which obtains in the creeds. The

Resurrection is asserted with a note of time, which makes it parallel to the Crucifixion and the Entombment. The Appearances are added as attesting the event which happened on the third day, and that event obviously has a direct relation to the tomb. Why else is the matter of the Saviour's burial thus definitely inserted in a short summary of essential facts? It is mentioned because it bears a definite relation to the Cross on the one side and the Uprising on the other. The burial would have had no importance whatever unless the Christian belief in the Resurrection was in some way connected with it; if S. Paul and the Corinthians had not held that this fact involved a disturbance of the sepulchre.

And S. Paul being what he was, we cannot imagine that he believed anything else than that the Body of CHRIST vacated the grave. He was not an exponent of modern psychical research who would hold theories of a spirit taking to itself some form of material embodiment by which it was enabled to enter into relations with the living. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and as such held their doctrine of a resurrection at the

last day, the expression of which was often materialistic in form. One of the martyrs in the Second Book of Maccabees, for instance, when about to be maimed, and even burned, declares that his persecutors may do what they will with his limbs, but that his hope is "to receive these back again" at the resurrection of the just. Now I do not say that S. Paul shared this crude habit of thought, but I cannot suppose, in view of the known teaching of the Pharisees, that he would have accepted any view of our LORD'S Resurrection which would have been indifferent to the condition of the tomb.

But as we read his famous argument with regard to the resurrection of the dead, his very theory of the spiritual body advanced to meet the Corinthian difficulty, which has been alleged as a reason for doubting whether he held that the Empty Tomb was part of the fact of CHRIST'S Resurrection, really confirms us in the conviction that he did. That S. Paul and the Corinthians believed this seems to be certain from the very fact that a difficulty was created by the inference of the resurrection of Christians. If a spiritual

body bearing no apparent relation to the crucified form of JESUS had satisfied the terms of S. Paul's preaching, would the difficulty have been felt at all? And would not the Apostle have at once removed it by pointing them to the fact that the rising out of the tomb of JESUS' crucified Body was not the doctrine he had preached? What it was necessary for him to show was that the corruption of the flesh of the saints, the cremation of their bodies, or the dispersion of their limbs—the obvious difficulties which occurred to the intelligent mind then as now—had no bearing upon the question, as GOD would give to each a spiritual body as it pleased Him. And that this was not the only way in which a spiritual body could be given, in S. Paul's view, is evident from his treatment of the case of those who should be alive on the earth at the coming of the LORD. These, he said, would be changed. There would be no transition from the mortal to the spiritual body, but a transformation of the natural into the spiritual, the mortal putting on immortality. That in itself seems to me to prevent us from arguing from the case of the departed saints

to that of our LORD. Rather would it be true to say that this view of the spiritualization of the bodies of the saints who would be alive and remain till the LORD's Coming, was derived from the analogy of the risen Body of CHRIST. It seems to me, therefore, quite beyond the possibility of doubt that S. Paul, in common with the primitive community, believed that the Body of JESUS had actually been raised from the grave. To them the fact was something of which not only the appearance of the risen Master but the Vacant Tomb was the witness and pledge.

But, it will be said, you do not establish the fact itself, but only the fact that the primitive Christians believed it to be a fact, by such an argument as this. That may be granted. It is true that the fact of history upon which Christianity as a public institution rests is the belief of the first Christians, and that the science of history can carry us no further. But when you reflect what Christianity means as a great power, a mighty institution, that has gone on accumulating force through nineteen centuries among the most progressive nations of the

world, that is still developing reserves of vitality enabling it to adapt itself to new conditions and to undertake fresh conquests, it becomes exceedingly difficult to believe that the form in which the belief took root was an illusion, that the grave in which the remains of the Crucified were deposited has continued undisturbed from that day to this, and that a simple discovery, such as would have entirely transformed the method of conceiving the Resurrection, even if it had been possible for it to obtain credence at all, was never made. The Gospel informs us of the story of bodysnatching circulated by the Jews at the time of the reported Resurrection, a story which we know to have been repeated at a somewhat later stage. This was an entirely appropriate method of meeting such a gospel as S. Paul preached, but only on the supposition that the easier task of showing the unbroken sepulchre was not open. If, on the one hand, there is no reason to doubt that the form under which the first Christians apprehended the Resurrection involved the conviction that the Body of JESUS would not be found in the

tomb where He had been buried; and if, on the other hand, there is no evidence whatever that those whose strongest interest it was to deny the reality of the risen CHRIST ever performed what at first would on this supposition have been the easy task of producing the crucified corpse; and if, further, the fact as received has only been challenged on general assumptions of the impossibility of its occurrence; I feel myself to be on very strong ground when I say that such a structure as Christianity must have an explanation that adequately accounts for so marvellous an intrusion upon the field of human affairs, and that the fact on which it rests is what it has been believed to be. To say that what happened was really something different seems to me to be inconsistent with any straightforward view of history at all.

Of course, in this matter we have to be very careful to confine ourselves to what came within the experience of those to whom we owe this belief. We may not say that it is not possible to develop finer and subtler modes of conceiving a fact than those under which it may at first have made its

way to acceptance. There is plenty of room for the operation of illusion in the education of mankind without appealing to it for the sake of denying the facts. But there is no half-way house between affirming and denying that there was no sign of the dead JESUS in the tomb on the third day. The question simply comes to be this—Does belief in the Resurrection of CHRIST rest on one experience or on two, on the manifestations alone or on the manifestations *plus* the vacancy in the tomb? The fact is a different one according as we answer "Yes" or "No." What I have contended is that the fact as believed in the Apostolic Church was consistent with the second, not with the first alternative.

When, however, we pass beyond this, we get into a region which can only be represented symbolically. No one saw CHRIST rise from the dead. It may, indeed, be questioned whether it was an event capable of being seen in the ordinary sense of the word. Whatever the first Christians may have believed—and who shall say how S. Peter or S. John would picture the event before his imagination?—we are under no

obligation to believe in the same way. Did the recumbent Figure rise up on Easter morning, fold up the cerements in which It had been swathed, issue from a door that opened at Its approach, and come forth? All sorts of questions at once arise, which, irrelevant as they may be, cannot be expelled from our imagination. How was the CHRIST clothed? Whither did He go? What did He do? Such speculations must be silenced at the very start. We have no material for deciding whether the buried CHRIST ever did get up at all, or move about in the manner appropriate to beings acting under the conditions which are normal to our present state of existence. Nothing is more impressive than the manner in which the LORD is represented as manifesting Himself to His disciples after His Resurrection. The disciples are crude enough, as I think you and I would have been too, and there is crudity in the Evangelists also. But nothing comes out more clearly than the new conditions under which the Saviour acts. He is the same, and yet how different! If S. Paul wanted a conception of the spiritual body for his argument with the Corinthians, nowhere

could he have got the impression more vividly than from those reports of the post-Resurrection appearances, with which He believed that his own "vision" on the road to Damascus essentially corresponded. There is no reason why the mode in which JESUS left the grave should not have been as independent of ordinary material considerations as His appearance among the disciples in the upper room. He is among them, and He vanishes out of their sight. We are not bound to suppose that on the Resurrection morning anything occurred which, had they not been asleep, the watch would have been able to report.

That brings us to the narratives of the Resurrection and the subsequent Appearances which are given in the four Gospels. It will be obvious from what has already been said that I do not regard our belief in the Resurrection as resting upon the detailed accuracy of these narratives. In the nature of the case no sort of documents could have been preserved, intended to present a duly-authenticated account of what took place, such as would satisfy the requirements of a modern scientific society. What the

Apostles were concerned to do was to present such testimony to their contemporaries as, coupled with the witness of the Spirit in the midst of the disciples, would lead converts to commit themselves to the Risen CHRIST. The narratives preserved in the Gospels are the traditions which grew up in the Apostolic Church on a basis of orally transmitted stories. The fact that there are discrepancies, and that there is difficulty in reconciling them in one consistent chronological account does not weaken, but rather strengthens the testimony which they bear to the one central fact as acknowledged by the Church. We may be perfectly certain that the Apostles were assured that our LORD was alive in all the fullness of His personality, and that they were convinced that the grave was empty—the two facts supporting each other to produce a belief that would not have established itself in their minds on the evidence of one of them apart from the other. And, at the same time, we may be certain that no perfectly intelligible accounts of these experiences could be given. If you have ever been at Oberammergau, and compared the wonderful tableaux, in which the

actors present the ordinary events of the Passion, with the grotesque failure of the attempts to portray the supranormal events, like the Agony in the Garden and the Resurrection itself, you will understand what I mean. Our imagination has no categories in which to represent such happenings. The best of us are almost bound to lapse into the language of popular representation—angels with wings, and the like. Picture to yourselves the excited women returning to the Eleven with their incoherent, feverish account of what they had experienced. We are told that the whole story, so far as they could make anything of it, sounded to those who heard it like idle tales. In the half-light of early morning they had seen the mouth of the cave open and the stone rolled away. That might easily have been the case—probably was the case—without any one being obliged to hold that the result had been produced otherwise than by normal means. They saw one or two figures in white. With no desire to assert that these were not heavenly visitants, we are not concerned to condemn the theory that what they saw was as natural an appearance as the

young man with a linen cloth cast about his naked body, whom S. Mark notices as having been present in the Garden when our LORD was taken prisoner.

Nor, knowing, as we do, how easily stories are altered in their passage from one mouth to another, ought we to expect that nothing is due, either in the case of the Resurrection narratives themselves, or in those of the subsequent Appearances, to the unconscious development of the story. Let me take an example of what I mean. In S. Luke we have the story of the Risen CHRIST being offered a piece of broiled fish and an honeycomb, and eating in the presence of His disciples. There is something in this which seems curiously unlike the general conception of a real though spiritual body, which clings to the Appearances taken as a whole. If in the Resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, it is difficult to connect with this condition a function like the reception of food. I do not say that CHRIST did not perform this action, as alleged in the third Gospel. But is it not possible to hold that an actual incident has in some way been embroidered in the telling?

I should hesitate to say that is impossible, or to describe as a rationalist any one who preferred to take this view of the occurrence. Incidentally this is just one of the reasons that seem to show the importance of the Empty Tomb. This is a fact which ordinary observers can express in language which accurately conveys to the ordinary mind what the experience was which it is intended to describe. Those who visited the spot did not find anything that they could recognize as the Body of JESUS. The rest must inevitably be coloured by the personality of those to whom the further experiences were granted. Given that fact, in itself purely negative and leading to nothing further apart from the manifestation to believers of the spiritual Body, I am enabled, as I should not be otherwise, to discount the personal equation in the attempts made by the primitive community to convey to others their conviction of the reality which such manifestations conveyed.

What, however, I want you to grasp is this. Our belief in the Resurrection does not rest upon a basis so narrow as the narratives at the end of the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel according to S. John. These

narratives must be read in the light of the whole of the New Testament and of the structure of Church history, with all that experience of the Risen CHRIST which is the outcome of the Apostolic witness. We are free to recognize in the accounts which the Evangelists give elements of inaccuracy, of imperfectly reported and imperfectly apprehended experience. We must learn to distinguish between the essential testimony, apart from which the fact would evaporate, and the ways in which men of different culture, different temperament, different outlook may represent the fact to themselves.

But let us never doubt that the fact is important, and that our religion would cease to be historical altogether if we no longer attached importance to facts. We are perfectly justified in watching with jealous eye all attempts to restate the fact, lest, in their eagerness to bring divine things within the analogy of their own experience, men should forget that after all the actions of a living GOD cannot be predicted by human foresight, and are reasonable because of the experience they create rather than of the conformity to previous knowledge which

they display. GOD shows us what is possible by what He does.

When we return to the leading events of our own past history, and reflect how our career has been determined by circumstances almost unimaginable but for the fact that they have occurred, we sometimes come almost to doubt whether what has actually taken place ever did happen. We place ourselves in imagination at a point immediately preceding the event, which brought us untold happiness or plunged us in the deepest sorrow. How endless appear the chances against that one result actually achieving itself. And when it comes to a past more remote than the limits of our own memory, such events begin to wear an aspect of such shadowy unreality that we begin almost to be certain that history must have been very different from our conception of it. The Peninsular War is as unsubstantial as the Siege of Troy! Has this common experience of the human mind nothing to do with the difficulty which some feel in being content with the report of the Resurrection, as it reaches us from the Apostolic Church?

IV

THE VIRGIN-BIRTH OF CHRIST

A FEW years ago a distinguished Cambridge mathematician, who holds a professorship in a Scottish University, happened to glance at a number of the *Hibbert Journal*, which lay upon my study table in Leeds. His eye fell upon an article devoted to a discussion upon the Virgin-Birth of our LORD. He turned somewhat sharply and said, "I am surprised that you theologians find any peculiar difficulty in believing the Virgin Birth. To my mind it is no more miraculous than the appearance in the world of a sinless human being." I have never forgotten these words of a layman whom I had never regarded as the slave of orthodoxy. They always have seemed to me to carry up into the mystery of our LORD'S own personality that parallel between

His power to heal disease and His authority to forgive sins which He appears to have wished us to detect in His activity—the physical power on the one hand and the moral authority on the other—when He dealt with the sick of the palsy at Capernaum. CHRIST never seems to have contemplated material force and spiritual greatness as belonging to spheres of being so distinct that the one could not become the sacrament or expression of the other. He in Whom the prince of this world, when he came, could find nothing, must inevitably rise again from the dead. Nor is it incredible that the advent of redemptive holiness should have taken the form of a creative act.

A native instinct of reverence would bid us shrink from canvassing a subject so delicate as the mode by which our LORD entered upon His earthly ministry of redemption. But the subject of the Virgin-Birth of CHRIST, or, as it is more accurately called, His virginal conception, is forced upon us by the spirit of inquiry which is characteristic of the human mind at all times, and more especially in an age of

intellectual activity. Nor is it by any means easy to see at once what are the grounds upon which we are able to accept it or what is its importance in the fabric of Christianity.

It is not uncommon for those who in modern times desire to throw doubt on this article of the Apostles' Creed either to describe it as the declaration of official theology and the expression of scholastic dogma or to dismiss it as little more than a conception of popular orthodoxy. As a matter of fact neither of these descriptions rightly characterizes a belief which carries us behind all orthodoxies, all systematic theology, all dogmatism of the schools, to an age which had not yet learned to distinguish with logical accuracy between the facts of Christianity and their significance. Remember what the Apostles' Creed is. No committee of theologians met to draw up its clauses. No Council was ever held to embody its watchwords or formulate its decrees in a documentary confession of faith. The Creed is an extension of the baptismal formula, and gathers up more or less systematically the cardinal features in the teaching

of the catechists concerning each of the three parts into which that formula, admittedly primitive, naturally divides itself. As time goes on we can trace developments in the Creed obviously caused by dogmatic considerations. Even as we have it the Apostles' Creed does not state the doctrine of the Trinity with a formal accuracy that would have satisfied the theologians of the fifth century. And, when we compare it with earlier forms of the Creed, we can see that words have been introduced with the obvious intention of guarding against inadequate ideas. But when we turn to the clauses which gather up the main facts of the manifestation of CHRIST, we are at once struck with the baldness of the statement. The significance of the life and death of JESUS are left to be gathered rather from the events chosen for detailed inclusion in the Creed than from any direct hint of the doctrinal value of those events. There has been some development of the words that immediately follow *suffered under Pontius Pilate*. The clause *He descended into hell* only became universal in the West at a comparatively late date. But no version of the ancient Western

Creed, to which we give the title of *Apostles'*, is known, which does not contain the statement *Conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary* in a form almost identical with that which we now recite. What does this mean? It means, in the first instance, that there never was anything controversial in the recitation of this article. It belongs to that simple statement of the fundamental Christian facts which the primitive catechists imparted to all candidates for Baptism. Whatever may be the significance of the events, these, according to the instructor, were the facts (shall we not say the irreducible minimum of facts?)—*He was conceived by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, rose again, and ascended.*

But, secondly, it is beyond dispute that the Apostles' or Western Creed (and the Eastern Creed was in all essentials similar) can be carried back to the second century. We know very well from the example of Justin Martyr, whose *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* cannot have been written later than A.D. 150, that writers in the middle of that century, or less than fifty years after the death of the last of the Apostles, could use

the Virgin-Birth for dogmatic purposes, much as Christian theologians have done ever since, accepting the fact without question as though it were one of those things about which there never had been any doubt in the Church. It was part of the A. B. C. of catechetical instruction, imparted to all believers with the same sort of authority as the Death and Resurrection of JESUS. You will find the evidence for this set out with conspicuous clearness in Dr. Swete's book on the Apostles' Creed. But as the Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge accepts without question this article of the historic Faith, he would doubtless be discounted as an apologetic and traditional writer by those who, with what right I know not, would arrogate to themselves the title of the historical and critical school. I therefore prefer to pass to the consideration of an important judgement of the famous leader of German theological thought, Dr. Harnack, of Berlin. None would discredit his statements on the ground that they did not represent independent and critical conclusions, more especially as he would regard the doctrine of the Virgin-Birth as belonging

to the age which immediately followed the times of the Apostles rather than to the period of the New Testament itself. In the course of a volume on the *Date of the Acts and the Synoptic Gospels* Professor Harnack speaks as follows :—

"Neither the γεννηθεὶς ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου (the phrase *Conceived by the Holy Ghost*) nor the Virgin-Birth compels us to assume an advanced period in the development of Christian doctrine ; on the contrary, these ideas, which have nothing to do with the idea of pre-existence, are primitive in themselves, and are declared to be primitive by the fact that at the end of the first century, or at least the beginning of the second century, they were the *common property* of Christians, as S. John (chap. i, according to the true text) and Ignatius teach us. But every belief which at that time was the common property of Christians (including the Palestinian Churches) must be traced back to the Churches of Palestine, and must be ascribed to the first decades after the Resurrection."[1]

[1] *Date of the Acts and the Synoptic Gospels.* Eng. Tr., p. 148.

Now that seems to me a very remarkable pronouncement, coming as it does from a scholar of universal reputation who holds no brief for orthodoxy. I should myself protest vigorously against the assumption that no one can arrive on grounds of historical science and scholarship at any conclusion which tallies with tradition. But here is a man with no ecclesiastical axe to grind, whose interests would rather lie in the direction of freedom from creeds and confessions. His words are, therefore, all the more remarkable.

You will observe that he carries the clause of the Creed, which is under discussion, further back still than we have yet been able to go. Not the middle of the second century, but the very beginning of it, if not the later years of the first century itself, must be taken as the point from which we can say with certainty that the Virgin-Birth was the common property of all Christians. "The common property" are the words used. Not, mark you, that no one knew anything about it before that date, but that it was at that time part of the ordinary equipment of the creed of a Christian. It is as though he

had said that the baptismal creed, which must be accepted by every godparent to-day as the condition on which his child is christened, was taught and received universally by the Christian communities in the very first years of the second century. He quotes Ignatius, who, as we know, was thrown to the lions in the Roman amphitheatre not later than A.D. 115. His words are very well known to all students. "The prince of this world," he says, meaning Satan, "was ignorant of the virginity of Mary, and of her child-bearing." And Dr. Swete[1] has noticed a characteristic of the argument of Ignatius which has an important bearing upon the value of his evidence. The heresy which he had to meet in Asia Minor asserted the unreality of the human experience of JESUS. It was inspired by that Oriental attitude towards the physical world, as essentially evil, which made matter a medium entirely unsuited for a divine revelation. The Docetists, therefore, contended, strange as their teaching may appear to our ordinary habits of thought, that our LORD's human experience was not a real one, and that the SON of

[1] *The Apostles' Creed*, iv.

GOD was neither born nor died. Ignatius passionately replied that the LORD did actually die, that He was actually born. Now what Dr. Swete notices is this. For the particular purpose which he had in hand Ignatius would have had a stronger case if he could have said, not only that JESUS CHRIST died the common death of all men, but that His entry into life was in no way different from theirs. If he could have replied, "But every one knows that Joseph was His father, as Mary was His mother," he would not have left his antagonists with the possible retort, "But even you admit that there was something abnormal in the manner of His birth. The virginity of Mary neutralizes the reality of her childbearing." I do not admit the validity of such an argument. What I want you to see is that in the churches of Asia Minor, to which Ignatius wrote, and in which his own experience had been gained, the Virgin-Birth must have been an accepted article of faith long before A.D. 115, which is the very latest date at which we can fix the letters of Ignatius.

Leaving on one side for the moment the

reference to the Fourth Gospel, we may take up the concluding part of Harnack's statement. These clauses of the Creed, if they were the common property of all Christians at the turn of the century, were therefore the property of the churches in Palestine. This involves two further inferences: (*a*) they "must be traced back to the churches of Palestine"; (*b*) they "must be ascribed to the first decades after the Resurrection."

Now this disposes finally of a theory, which I think has gained considerable currency in the public mind, that there is some real analogy between the belief in our LORD'S Virgin-Birth and the legends of pagan mythology. "The Jewish-Christian idea"—again I quote Prof. Harnack—"has nothing whatever to do with mythology."[1] Nor is this writer content to stop here. "In its later history," he says, "every mythological taint was carefully guarded against." The likeness to heathen legends is only superficial. The differences are, in fact, much greater than those resemblances, to which early Christian writers were so much alive, both with regard to this and other features

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 144.

of the Christian system, that they freely spoke of the pagan myths as attempts on the part of the demons to forestall the work of GOD by ignoble caricatures. No such hypothesis is necessary in the case of the Virgin-Birth, for the principle upon which these legends have proceeded was always sexual. Take the case of Perseus, for example. He was a Greek demigod or hero, who is said to have owed his origin to the union of his mother Danaë with the god Zeus, who visited her in a shower of gold. The only parallel within the covers of the Bible to romances of this sort is the old-world story from Genesis which tells how the sons of GOD became the mates of the daughters of men, and so fathers of the giants. Nothing could be further from the habits of Hebrew thought in the first century than the ideas which could issue in such stories. Nor is anything more unlike the account of our LORD'S Birth which is given in the Gospels. This is clearly recognized by those who would nevertheless desire to give to the article which asserts the Virgin-Birth nothing more than a representative or symbolic value. Such, for

example, is Dr. Paul Lobstein of Strassburg, whose book on the subject, translated in the "Crown" series, has probably not been without its effect in recent speculation. "Nothing," says this writer, "warrants historical criticism in considering the tradition of the miraculous Birth of CHRIST as merely the outcome of elements foreign to the religion of Biblical revelation."[1] Harnack would go further and say that, whatever explanation of this belief may be given, it should contain no elements but those which might conceivably exist within the circle of the Hebrew-Christian congregations.

But further. The tradition of the Virgin-Birth must have arisen within "the first decades after the Resurrection," or well within the lifetime of the majority of the Apostles. Those who make the most of the fact that there is no apparent reference to the Virgin-Birth in the Epistles of S. Paul nevertheless acknowledge that he probably knew that it was asserted. For my own part I should say that any one to whom S. Luke was a companion certainly knew this. But let that pass. Dr. Swete, dis-

[1] *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, Eng. Tr., p. 76.

cussing the narratives of the Infancy which are found in S. Matthew and S. Luke, but not in S. Mark, makes the following statement: "Apart from the question of the date of the completion of our present Matthew, both these documents show every indication of being genuine products of the first century, probably of a generation anterior to the Fall of Jerusalem." It is these documents, as we all know, that declare unequivocally that JESUS was born of a Virgin. And Dr. Swete believes that they are to all intents and purposes earlier than A.D. 70. But, as I reminded you, he is under suspicion as an apologist. So I go back to Harnack. The tradition of the Virgin-Birth, he contends, must come to us from the "first decades after the Resurrection," which is tantamount to saying "before that epoch-making event the Fall of Jerusalem." And, when he comes to examine the narratives which have been incorporated in the Synoptic Gospels, what is his opinion concerning them? "In the most important verses (i. 18–25) of the story of the Infancy in the First Gospel nothing is to be found that could not have been written about

A.D. 70." Of the Lucan narratives his judgement is: "We may regard them, though foreign to S. Mark, as ancient tradition of Palestinian origin."

What, then, becomes of the argument with which Prof. Lobstein, in the preface of the little book to which I have already referred, meets Dr. Randolph's contention that the "differences and even discrepancies between the two accounts" of Matthew and Luke, serve "to strengthen their witness to the great central fact in which they are at one?" It is very easy to lift your eyebrows, as Lobstein does, and exclaim, "Pray, how can two documents, both of which are individually far from trustworthy, ever attain, by simply being joined together, that cogency which separately they lack?" I do not by any means regard Dr. Randolph's short essay on the Virgin-Birth as entirely satisfactory. But in this case it is Lobstein and not Randolph who does not see what the critical position demands. These documents, as the discrepancies show, are not dependent the one upon the other. They have hardly anything in common. But both are acknowledged to belong to that early period of the

Christian tradition which precedes the dispersion of the mother church of Jerusalem. They are, therefore, independent witnesses of first-rate importance to a fact, which is tending to establish itself on other grounds as well, that the Virgin-Birth of CHRIST was acknowledged in the primitive Hebrew congregations within a quarter of a century after CHRIST was crucified.

This is about as far as we can go upon purely critical grounds. Let me remind you of what I have said more than once in the course of these lectures—that no one can demonstrate with the accuracy of mathematics the truth of those great facts, or, if you will, assumptions of fact, upon which Christianity rests. There must always be room for the exercise of a living and active faith. We can force no man into accepting the supranormal elements in the story of CHRIST; and I would ask you never to attempt it. That is not the way to take men. But in this matter of the Virgin-Birth we are reduced, as it seems to me, to one of two hypotheses, for an explanation of the primitive belief.

The first alternative is this. It is a fact.

That it was not put forward in the preaching of the day of Pentecost is no marvel at all. The Gospel, as a record of the experience of the Apostles, could not contain it. Though Mary was herself with them in the upper room when the Spirit came upon them, they may not even have known it. Look at the Book of the Acts, and you will see at once what were the conditions of the proclamation. Describing the qualifications of a successor to the vacant place in the Apostolic college, S. Peter lays down what these conditions are. "Of the men which have companied with us all the time that the LORD JESUS went in and out among us, beginning from the Baptism of John, unto the day that he was received up from us, of these must one become a witness with us of His Resurrection" (*Acts* i. 21, 22). The public preaching of the Gospel was then, as it is to-day, the testimony of a personal experience, culminating in the Resurrection, by which, as S. Paul puts it, JESUS was "marked off as the SON of GOD" (*Rom.* i. 4). It could be nothing else. "What we have seen and heard and our hands have handled of the Word of life declare we unto you"

(1 *S. John* i. 1). The miracle of the Incarnation, is Butler's eighteenth-century way of putting it, requires other miracles to support it. The Virgin-Birth could not on any showing be "the beginning of the Gospel" (*S. Mark* i. 1). No one would have any use for it to whom the Resurrection meant nothing. Consequently the earliest Gospel, that according to S. Mark, begins with the Baptism of John, and would probably end, but for the fact that a fragment has been torn off and lost, with the last Commission and Promise (cf. *S. Matt.* xxviii. 19, 20). But it is no legitimate inference from this fact that all the rest is to be rejected.[1]

If this hypothesis—that the Virgin Birth is true in fact—be rejected, there is only one other which in the present state of knowledge seems possible. The doctrine with which we have been dealing falls, as I reminded you at the outset, into two portions—(1) conceived by the HOLY GHOST, (2) born of the Virgin Mary. If we reject the fact, we must find some explanation involving no postulates that are not purely Hebrew. We must endeavour to

[1] See Note B, p. 113.

explain the belief by asking ourselves, what ideas was it possible that men of Jewish race, thought, and associations should have come to entertain under stress of the conviction that JESUS of Nazareth was a transcendent Messiah.

Assuming JESUS to be the expected Redeemer, it would have been quite consistent with the mind of the Old Testament, or rather would have been required by the Hebrew conception of the nation's destinies as moulded by the creative power of Jehovah, to ascribe His origin to the creative influence of the Spirit. We must begin, therefore, by supposing that stress was, in the first instance, laid upon the conception of CHRIST by the Spirit, which has not only always been part of the Creed, but is a conspicuous element in both the Gospel narratives. So far as I am aware there is no evidence of this, and, when we do find doctrinal speculation at work upon the subject, it seems to be rather the other aspect of it, the virginity of Mary, which is prominent in the mind of the religious thinker. But we may let that pass. It is not impossible that this part of the hypothesis may be true

in fact. Whence, then, do we get the Virgin-Birth? It would seem to be clear that nothing was less congenial to the mind of the Hebrew contemporaries of our LORD, as nothing is more repugnant to the ideas of their descendants at the present day. I think if you interrogated a modern Jew you would find him more ready to accommodate himself to the scandal of the Cross than to the story of Bethlehem. All we can say, therefore, is that the words of Isaiah vii. 14, which are quoted in S. Matthew, "*Behold, a virgin shall conceive,*" were suggestive of the event which they are invoked to attest. Once get the idea that the prophets anticipated the life of CHRIST in its detail no less than in its general principle, and the Virgin-Birth becomes an alleged fact because it is an undoubted prediction.

All I can say is that the difficulties of this view seem to me to be almost insurmountable. Because the Greek word which is used by the translators in the Bible current among the Greek-speaking Jews means virgin rather than young woman, which is all that the original Hebrew

implies, it seems to me to be requiring a great deal, if we are to suppose that readers brooding over the sacred text evolved from it a meaning which is neither present in the original nor conformable to Hebrew ideas. Rather, as it seems to me, the use of this text in the First Gospel is parallel to the citation of Hosea's words, "Out of Egypt have I called My SON," in connection with the flight into Egypt. They would never have dreamt of applying either of these passages to JESUS of Nazareth, had they not been convinced that He was the Messiah, Who was destined to recapitulate in His career the whole history and destiny of the chosen people, and accepted as facts what they subsequently discovered as predictions in the writings of the Prophets.

Well, these are the alternatives. We must either believe that the Virgin-Birth was a fact, or adopt some such theory as I have attempted both to sketch and to criticize. There is one further inquiry that we must make. Do the primitive Christians appear to have had any use for the Virgin-Birth, or did they merely adopt it because they believed that it had occurred?

This is an important line of investigation, because there is always a temptation, if the real relation of any detail to the whole economy has not been discovered, to deal with that detail as the modern surgeon is apt to treat the human appendix. Here, then, I take up the last point in that paragraph of Harnack which I read at an early stage in this lecture, his reference to the Prologue of S. John. Let me recall his words:

"They were the *common property* of Christians, as S. John (chap i, according to the true text) and Ignatius teach us."

Now I notice that Lobstein, speaking of the Christianity preached in its fullness by Paul and John, declares that "neither of them ever referred to the precise mode of CHRIST's entrance into the world."[1] By Christianity in its fullness I suppose he means a doctrine that includes the pre-existence of CHRIST, which it is perfectly certain that both these writers held. Notice that they are classed together. S. Paul taught that in the fullness of time GOD sent forth His SON born of a woman (*Gal.* iv. 4),

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

that the SON, in Whom all things consist (*Col.* i. 15, 17), was the image of the invisible GOD, and that, though He was from all eternity in the form of GOD, He took upon Him the form of a slave (*Phil.* ii. 6, 7). The import of these passages is as clear as the prologue of S. John's Gospel, which tells of the eternal Word Who was in the beginning with GOD, Who was Himself GOD, and Who became Flesh (*S. John* i. 1, 14). There is no question that this was the apostolic faith, but it was a faith for which the Apostles had to fight, and it was not grasped by all the members of the primitive community. Those who accepted the Gospel as preached on the day of Pentecost, and who would have assented in their own sense of the words to the Pauline declaration that JESUS was marked off as the SON of GOD by the Resurrection from the dead, refused, or a large number of them refused, to enter into that fuller teaching which history proves to have been essential to the continuance of the Christian Faith. It would seem as though for a time the Christian community remained poised between two possibilities—either to go for-

ward to that complete belief in the deity of CHRIST which has come to be called the Catholic Faith or to relapse into a view of His Person and work which left their Master but an etherealized Hebrew Messiah, the summit of Jewish, or, shall we say, human evolution, and not the spiritual Creator of a new race. It is a matter of history that in consequence there arose what proved to be evanescent sects, and that many of their members denied the Virgin-Birth. This I think they were logically bound to do. They had no use for it.

Now with regard to one of these two writers—S. John—Harnack positively asserts that the true reading of the famous prologue, in which he sets forth the doctrine of the pre-existence of the SON, held by him in common with S. Paul, makes it clear that he accepted the story of the Virgin-Birth. It is not quite certain to which verse he refers. It is well known that he regards "GOD only-begotten," in verse 18, which the English Revised Version gives as alternative to "the only-begotten SON," to have been established without dispute as the true reading. But

it is difficult to see how that reading differs essentially from that of the Received Text. He may, however, be referring to the reading of verse 13, which is found in the early Latin versions, and which would require us to substitute "Who was born" for "which were born." Lobstein appears to adopt this view of the passage, for he explains it on the lines of the interpretation of Melchizedek given in Hebrews, that is, as declaring CHRIST's spiritual independence, not only of a father, but of a mother also (see *Heb.* viii. 3). However this may be, the fact remains that Harnack maintains the idea of the Virgin-Birth to be present in the Prologue of St. John.

If this is the case, there can be no doubt at all that when in verse 13 the writer speaks of birth, "not of bloods (the word is plural, and means "a union of blood"), nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of GOD," he is thinking of the Virgin-born as both type and source of the Christian experience of regeneration.[1] The thought

[1] Compare the words of Dr. Garvie in *The Christian Certainty and the Modern Perplexity* (p. 202), concerning S. Paul's statement of CHRIST's Death and Resurrection:—

of the whole passage may be expressed thus.

First of all the writer asserts the eternity of the Word. Then he declares that there took place a birth which was the direct result of the action of the creative will of GOD. There was no union of blood, no intervention of the human will. It was the beginning of a great creative and redemptive activity. Spiritual birth is not merely the activity of the Spirit in regenerating each individual who is made in CHRIST a new creature, who receives that virgin life which is the gift of GOD, a miracle of converting grace, in every one that believeth. No, it is redemptive, creative, spiritual from the beginning, the impulse of the FATHER'S love unconditioned by the feeble, sin-stained wills of the children of men. And so the Word became Flesh. I do not doubt that the acceptance of the Virgin-Birth of CHRIST was the determining factor in perfecting the Apostolic Faith.

Do you tell me that birth from a virgin is no proof of pre-existence? I readily acknowledged it. Do you tell me that

"These historical facts were for him both the *type* and *source* of his personal experience." See also Note C, p. 115.

S. Paul could never have rested the whole weight of his immense conviction that JESUS was the image of GOD, or the author of the Fourth Gospel his conclusion that the Son of Mary was the Word made Flesh, upon the supposition that the CHRIST entered into the world without the intervention of a human father? Again I am with you. Or do you say that the narratives of S. Matthew and S. Luke show no trace of the suggestion that the manner of the Saviour's Birth was connected by some necessary link of causation with His Godhead? That is plain on their surface. They are simple but infinitively touching narratives which naïvely state what they believe to be a fact. Or do you take another ground, and say that you can conceive of a sinless human being whose mode of generation in no way differed from yours or mine? Again I say such a picture does not exceed my imagination. But if you say, Could not GOD have redeemed the world otherwise than by sending His SON as the Virgin-born, I am bound to reply that I do not know what GOD might have done. I am content to begin from what I believe He has done. With Lobstein I believe

unreservedly that "the divine life, incarnate in JESUS CHRIST and imparted by Him to humanity, proceeds from a divine source, that it did not issue from the low depths of our sin-polluted earth, but that it is the emanation of a force, the ultimate cause and secret of which we do not discover in ourselves." But, unlike Lobstein, I do not believe that such a faith somehow got itself expressed in a mythological story of a virgin-birth. How, I ask, did it do this, if, as his own argument attempts to prove, there is no sort of affinity between the kernel and the husk? To my mind it is a reversal of the universal order of fact and faith. If once you can rid yourself of that general prejudice, which it was the object of my earlier lectures to remove—that a fact which is outside the ordinary working of the divine activity in the (so-called) "laws of creation" is therefore beyond the limit of the Creative Will—I believe you will come to see that a simple, straightforward review of our Christian origins tends in a precisely opposite direction.

Virgin-birth is not a proof of pre-existence, far less of eternal Godhead. If the Apostles

had been without their experience of His Personality, culminating as it did in the Resurrection, it stands to reason that, in common with their Ebionite opponents, they would have refused to accept, or at least to retain, as any one of us would be fully justified in doing, the testimony of those who alone could know that Joseph was not in the strictly physical sense of the word the father of JESUS. But the attitude of the Ebionites proves that it was possible to accept the Resurrection, and yet to see in CHRIST not the outbreak of a new life but only the highest point of human evolution. The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel shows how the disclosure of the Virgin-Birth clinched in the minds of the Apostolic believers the conviction that CHRIST was indeed a new creation, thus completing the circuit of their experience. The definite, unequivocal assertion that JESUS was "the image of the invisible GOD," the Word of the FATHER, was the final expression of that experience.

NOTE A

As S. Paul appears to teach, etc., p. 62.

IT is argued, with some degree of plausibility, that S. Paul, holding a current Jewish doctrine of the transmutation of flesh and blood into spirit, believed that the spiritualized bodies of the dead would be raised out of the tomb at the last trump. If he did so, there can be no question that, in the case of CHRIST's Resurrection, he accepted the Empty Tomb. But the argument of 1 Corinthians xv has been used to throw doubt upon this view of what S. Paul believed, and I have so constructed my argument in the text to show that, if the Apostle's theory of the resurrection of the dead was such as I have described in the text, there is still no doubt as to what he held concerning the Resurrection of CHRIST.

It is not improbable that, expecting a

speedy return of the LORD in glory, he would anticipate an uprising of the saints corresponding generally to the manner in which CHRIST had Himself vacated the sepulchre. But we have still to account for the form which the difficulty of the Corinthians took. If they believed that JESUS had risen on the third day, why was their imagination baffled by the thought of the resurrection of the dead? The answer, surely, is, that the conditions were different. It will be remembered that, in Acts ii. 24–31, S. Peter lays stress on the fact that the LORD's Body did not see corruption. But the case which the Corinthians put is that of Christians whose bodies did see corruption. Nor may we suppose that they dismissed possibilities, like those which were subsequently realized in the martyrdom of S. Ignatius, whose body was devoured by beasts; or S. Polycarp, who passed through the fire. The analogy of the seed, which S. Paul uses, does meet this difficulty. We must not be enslaved to our imagination. Who, previous to experience, would from the seed predict the ear? Similarly, we have no experience

(clearly the Resurrection of JESUS is not regarded as such) which enables us to form a picture of the manner in which "this corruptible must put on incorruption."

It will be said that such a view tends to destroy the parallel between our LORD's Resurrection and our own, if we accept the tradition of the Empty Tomb. In the mind of S. Paul this would certainly not be the case, for he would never deny (his argument forbids him to deny) that there would be continuity between the natural and the spiritual body. Nor have we any right to argue that, on this showing, the Empty Tomb was nothing more than an "economic miracle," necessary, perhaps, to produce conviction, but not essential to the reality of CHRIST'S glorified Body. We do not know whether JESUS could have entered into His glory by any other road; nor does the idea of an "economic miracle," wrought at the very crisis of Redemption, commend itself to the mind that sees in the Resurrection the crown rather than the attestation of the victory over death.

NOTE B

It is no legitimate inference, etc., p. 98.

IT has been argued that the Synoptic narrative not only ignores, but implicitly denies the tradition of the Virgin-Birth. Little can be made of the fact that JESUS is spoken of as "the Carpenter's son" (though S. Mark has "the carpenter," vi. 3), for not only would the people be ignorant of any unusual circumstance connected with His birth, but the divine interposition was of such a nature as to leave Him still for all ordinary purposes "the son of Joseph." A more relevant objection is urged by Lobstein. Referring to the incident narrated in S. Mark iii. 31–34, where the Mother, with the brethren of our LORD, desires to lay hold on Him, the writer observes: "These fears would be absolutely inconceivable were it true that Mary was piously treasuring, as

a family tradition, the lively remembrance of the scenes of the Annunciation and of the Nativity."

Any one who could speak of the Annunciation as a "family tradition" almost puts himself outside the range of serious discussion, and even to apply this term to the "scenes of the Nativity" is to read the New Testament in the light of the picture-galleries and the conventions of Christian Art. To represent the conduct of the Virgin as unintelligible, on the supposition that she was aware of the miraculous conception and the circumstances by which it was accompanied, is to argue as though she could have anticipated, if not the dogmatic statements of the Creed, at least the glorification of the Risen CHRIST. Those who deny the Virgin-Birth are the first to insist that it proves nothing. At the most Mary could not have believed more concerning her Son than was expressed by S. Peter at Caesarea Philippi, when he acknowledged his Master as the Messiah. But this did not prevent the disciple from immediately taking him to task for embarking upon what seemed a suicidal course!

NOTE C

Not of bloods, etc., p. 105

So much is said about the apparent materialism, which seems to be involved in the tradition of the Virgin-Birth, that it is worth while to insist that the argument here used is a moral one. It has nothing to do with the supposed inappropriateness of the Word becoming flesh through the physical union of two parents. What the Fourth Gospel means to establish in relation to the life of the spirit is its independence of human will. Or, more exactly, the entrance of the SON of GOD into the world, through the submission of the will of His mother to the operation of the HOLY SPIRIT, corresponds to the birth of the new life in the regenerated personality of the believer through submission to the active loving Will of GOD. The principle according to which the Divine

life takes possession of man is that of new creation.

There is nothing *a priori* in this argument. We do not assert that an incarnation of GOD necessitates a Virgin-Birth. All we can say is that, as a matter of fact, we know nothing of an incarnation which does not involve it, for the historical Incarnation is *ex hypothesi* the only instance. Christian theology is the interpretation of the facts, and of all the facts, as we have them. That JESUS is the SON of GOD, Who is of one substance with the FATHER, no more follows from the Virgin-Birth, taken by itself, than from the Resurrection or the coming of the HOLY GHOST, taken by itself. What we are entitled to do is to eliminate for the purpose of discussion this or that alleged fact from the Christian tradition, and to ask whether the form of our Christology would be affected by its disappearance. My growing conviction is that neither S. Paul nor S. John would have expressed the relation of CHRIST to history under the forms which they have adopted if they had known nothing of the Virgin-Birth, just as He would not have been to them the "Risen"

CHRIST, if they had not accepted the Empty Tomb. The apostolic interpretation of CHRIST would have been an "isoscele deficient at the base," and would have proceeded on Nestorian rather than "Catholic" lines.

It need hardly be said that there can be nothing "economic" in the Virgin-Birth, for this reason, if for no other—that it is not a public event and part of the common experience. But even if it were, we should still believe that it was the way by which the Incarnation was effected, and not a device for announcing to mankind that GOD had become man. The Creator does not advertise, and economic miracles are of the nature of public advertisement. But at the same time it is through the use of new methods that we are able to discern that the Creative Consciousness has entered upon a new plane of activity. Redemption is a new work of the Divine Personality in an old world or it is nothing. CHRIST is not evolved out of the existing order.

The difficulty of the Virgin-Birth is one that belongs to the intellectualist, not the vital thinker.

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